

Long Beach priest bids farewell after 43 years, prepares for return to Ireland



Brenda and Carroll Ibele say goodbye to Rev. Louis Lohan, center, during a reception on Thursday at St. Thomas Apostle Catholic Church in Long Beach. AMANDA MCCOY — SUN HERALD

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LONG BEACH -- The congregation at St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in Long Beach held a farewell gathering Thursday for the Rev. Louis Lohan, who retires and departs next week for his hometown of County Galway, Ireland.

"I'm looking forward to it but extremely grateful for the life that has been mine -- so blessed," Lohan said. He leaves for Ireland on Jan. 21.

Lohan dedicated most of his ministry to South Mississippi, arriving in Pascagoula in 1971 when the Catholic community numbered only 3 to 4 percent of the population.

For many years, he served at churches along the Coast, then finally settled at St. Thomas the Apostle, where he stayed for nearly 22 years.

"I am definitely taking away that God is important to the people here," he said. "God and organized religion still have a value, and people need somebody to lead them in organized religion and getting in contact with God."

Lohan said his most memorable moment while serving in Mississippi was the Mass at W.J. Charles Elementary School on the Sunday following Hurricane Katrina's landfall in August 2005.

"That was probably the most profound gathering of believing people that I've ever encountered," he said. "And that tells me that when people are at the bottom, God is real for them. When you strip everything off, all that's left is God."

Lohan plans to take up farming in Ireland, the environment he grew up in.

"I have acquired a little bit of agricultural land," he said. "I'll get some sheep, some cattle and a garden. I'll have a good vegetable garden, so I'll have good soup for you when you come -- good Irish stew."

His departing message for his Mississippi flock is simple yet powerful.

"My philosophy and my theology is very simple: I believe that there is a God and that he sent his son Jesus as our savior and that God loves us no matter what we do, have done or where we've been," Lohan said. "God loves us."